

A Day I'll Never



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When I kissed my wife and baby boy goodbye on the morning of Aug. 31, 2004, I never could have imagined what the day had in store. It was a dark and rainy afternoon, and I was bringing some family members to visit my squadron's spaces and to see the mighty P-3C Orion for the first time at NAS Jacksonville.

A few miles off base, I merged onto I-295, headed south, when the traffic suddenly slowed ahead. A few seconds later, I saw what looked like a mannequin lying

next to the road. No one in my car could figure out what a mannequin would be doing on the interstate. Unfortunately, we soon realized we were mistaken.

As we got closer, I noticed a car in the middle lane with the front end smashed and the horn blaring continuously. Far to my left, in the median of the interstate, was a car with its rear axle up on the railing. The next thing I realized was that no police or emergency vehicles were at the scene yet. For that matter, no motorists were getting out to assist.

Forget



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It quickly became apparent that we just had missed being part of a very serious car crash. At the same time, the unthinkable became a reality—what had appeared to be a mannequin at the side of the road actually was a human body.

I can't really explain why, but my first instinct was that I needed to help. It would have been much easier to continue on our way and to tell everyone what we had seen, but that idea didn't seem right. I pulled over to the side of the road and crossed the interstate

to check on the people in the mishap vehicles. They were conscious and, despite having minor injuries, assured me they were OK. After verifying someone already had called 911, I ran over to the man we had seen lying on the side of the road.

As I got closer, I realized the man's leg had been amputated just below the hip. A woman already had reached him, and, as I approached, she told me he still was breathing but had lost a lot of blood. I knew the most important thing I needed to do was to stop the bleeding, but how?

For a couple of seconds, my mind drew a blank. I didn't think I had any way to stop so much blood from a main artery, but then I remembered I was wearing a T-shirt. I unzipped my flight suit, took off my T-shirt, and used my pocketknife to cut it in half. I then tied my T-shirt around his leg as high on his hip as possible to create a tourniquet. This effort seemed to stop some of the blood, but I couldn't get the T-shirt tight enough. About this time, another man approached, and I noticed he was wearing a belt. I asked him to take it off so I could make a much tighter tourniquet.

While waiting for an ambulance to arrive, we kept telling the victim to breathe. We also kept checking his pulse and trying to assure him everything would be OK. He still was alive when the ambulance came a short time later. As I learned the next day, though, he died at the hospital shortly after arrival. The report said he was a 32-year-old tow-truck driver. He had been trying to rig a disabled car on the side of the highway in the pouring rain when another car lost control on the slippery road and crushed him between the two vehicles.

I must admit that witnessing such a tragedy changes something inside you. Even though the tow-truck driver didn't survive, I know it was extremely important for me to have stopped and rendered aid. Much of what I did was pure instinct, but the first aid and survival training I've had during my Navy years prepared me for what I had to do that day. Because of that training, the victim at least had a chance.

I often think that, just like me, he probably kissed his family goodbye that morning before heading off to what he undoubtedly thought would be another normal workday. The events of that Aug. 31, however, are a sad reminder of how special each day is that we spend with our families and friends. ■